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SUBJECT: LEBANON: BULGARIA CONDEMNS QANA ATTACK, CALLS FOR
CEASE-FIRE

REF: STATE 124950

11. SUMMARY/COMMENT: The Bulgarian government has closely coordinated its position with that of the EU from the outset of the Israel/Hezbollah conflict. On July 13, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement calling for maximum restraint from all parties, condemning the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers, calling for Hezbollah to release the soldiers and cease rocket fire into Israel, and for Lebanon to establish control over its territory. The MFA also condemned Israel's bombing of Lebanon, and called on the former to restrain their actions and not violate the borders.

However, the MFA released another statement on July 31, strongly condemning Israel's recent air raids in Qana and the deaths of civilians, including many children, and calling for a cease-fire. The recent statement also calls for an international force to assist the Lebanese Army in establishing control in the South. This differs in tone from their original statement on July 13, which castigates both sides - but lays the blame on Hezbollah for initiating things. Ambassador Beyrle is meeting August 3 with Parliament's leadership to brief them using refTel guidance.
END SUMMARY/COMMENT

12. Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivailo Kalfin, expressly stated in an interview on July 31 that while Israel had the right to defend itself, its reaction has been extremely disproportional. Kalfin says that there should be a cease-fire as soon as possible, which he pointedly notes, differs from the U.S. policy of giving Israel more time to deal with Hezbollah. Bulgarian public opinion also seems to be shifting away from Israel, which is perceived as causing the death of innocent civilians, many of whom are children. The Israeli air raids, especially the recent Qana attack sparked at least one rally in Sofia, where hundreds protested Israel's actions. In addition, the front pages of almost all newspapers ran heartrending pictures of Lebanese rescuers pulling dead bodies of children out of the debris in the village of Qana.

13. Statement issued July 31: Declaration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the situation in Lebanon

The Republic of Bulgaria expresses serious concern over the continuing escalation in violence between Israel and Hezbollah over the last few days.

We strongly condemn Israeli air raids on the Lebanese town of Qana on 30 July 2006, killing dozens of civilians, most of whom were children. We express our most sincere condolence on the inexcusable death of innocent people. The unbalanced use of power, which has grave consequences for the civilians in Lebanon, only worsens the crisis that cannot be solved by force.

Voting satisfaction with Israel's decision to suspend air strikes for 48 hours, we reconfirm our stance that only a total cease-fire can create conditions for further

negotiations between the concerted countries, ensure application of UN resolutions and an agreement on deployment of international forces, which will assist the Lebanese armed forces in establishing full control over South Lebanon.

14. MFA statement issued July 13:

The Republic of Bulgaria expresses deep concern over the escalation of tension and the deterioration of the security situation in the region of the Middle East recently. Without doubt, violence cannot bring an acceptable solution to any side. In connection with that, we appeal to all the countries concerned to display maximum restraint and not to resort to the use of force and other measures which are contrary to international law standards.

We condemn sharply the kidnapping of the two Israeli soldiers. We consider that the Shiite Lebanese organization Hezbollah needs to release them immediately and to cease the rocket fire to Israel's territory. The Lebanese government also needs to undertake all necessary measures in order to establish control over its territory and to prevent further attacks against Israel.

We condemn sharply Israeli Army bombardments of Lebanon which lead to the killing of tens of innocent Lebanese citizens. Israel needs to refrain from such actions and to not violate the borders of the Lebanese state.

We appeal to Israel and Lebanon to respect the border between the two countries, determined by the UN after the withdrawal of Israeli forces from South Lebanon in 2000.
Beyrle